

send the part, and you might let me know in the morning what your sawbones advises."

He called:  
"Tommy! Tommy Ball! Go with Mr. Carlton and see that he gets a taxicab. Fire ahead, Quaille. It's getting late. Bad enough to have to hear plays on a full stomach."

Carlton walked from the stage, lurching a little. Quaille watched him go, curiously convinced that fright rather than illness had urged him. He went on. All at once he realized how familiar these words were to the dingy walls, the empty seats. Yet how different was his voice from the ones they remembered!

THERE wasn't much more. At the close he looked up, expecting the usual chorus of gratitude or disappointment. The company accepted the play in silence.

"Well?" McHugh prompted.

"I think I can do well enough with Marjorie," Barbara said.

"Of course you can," McHugh snapped.

"What do you think I hired you for?"

The others made equally formal comments.

As he gathered up the pages of his manuscript Quaille noticed that Dolly and Barbara stood apart at a portion of the stage toward which the old woman had glanced often during the reading. She whispered, and Barbara appeared to listen with a sort of fascination.

The picture worried Quaille. It prompted him to meet Barbara, as if by accident, when she stepped from the stage door. They spoke aimlessly for a few moments.

"Miss Timken," he said at the first opportunity, "seemed a little reminiscent to-day. I dare say she was telling you, just now, how Woodford died. Wasn't it over there where you stood?"

Barbara nodded.

"Yes. She told me all about his pride and jealousy, and the way he struggled to go on playing when he was too ill, and how the black cat ran out—"

She drew her coat more closely about her.

"She gave me the shivers. Said she had a feeling there was a cat near her all the time this afternoon."

Quaille was uncomfortable. Such a fancy fitted too neatly with last night's scare.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Why?"

He reached out and touched her hand: it was cold.

"I thought so," he said. "She's played on your nerves."

"Now, please!" she laughed. "For an actress, I've always prided myself on having none."

He smiled, indicating the alley entrance.

"Your blues won't last long out there. Shall we go on?"

He walked to the street with her, and put her in a cab. He experienced a special welcome for himself in the lights and the activity.

CARLTON did not appear for rehearsal the next day, but McHugh had talked with him over the telephone. His doctor had prescribed a few days' rest, and McHugh had sent the part up to him.

"That's a relief," he said; "because Carlton's a good actor."

"Why this sudden attack of nerves?" Quaille asked.

McHugh grunted.

"Cut that out, Quaille. No more nerve business here. I got my eyes open, but nothing else has happened, and nothing will."

Quaille found, however, that the manager had taken an unprecedented step. Instead of turning the early rehearsals over to one of his men, he announced that he would direct the production from the beginning himself. It fixed Quaille's belief that McHugh, in spite of his attitude of a scoffer, was still apprehensive.

The manager led him to the auditorium. "Company down stage!" he roared.

When they had gathered at the footlights, McHugh thrust his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat.

"The leading man," he announced, "is

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under the weather for a few days. Until he comes back, Tommy Ball will feed you his sides. So play up to him as if he was Carlton."

Tommy, gorgeous for the occasion in tan shoes, check suit, and a lavender necktie, to hide his embarrassment fingered the pages of the part and began to read Carlton's lines with harsh, uncultured power.

Quaille had to hide his mirth. He was convinced he would never be able to purge Marshall's rôle of Tommy's voice. The worst of it was, the youth had an instinct for the stresses, but he exaggerated them insufferably. He capped Barbara's or Dolly's pleasing modulations with the roar of a lion.

Suddenly Dolly advanced to the footlights with an angry gesture.

"I can't stand it, Mr. McHugh!"

"Nothing in the script about sitting down here. Get it off your mind."

"You ought to guess, Mr. McHugh. It's Tommy—the way he's reading."

Tommy blushed. McHugh grinned.

"Tommy's mother didn't raise her boy to be an actor. Jealous of his style? What's the matter with Tommy?"

"I tell you, it puts my nerves on edge," the woman persisted. "Maybe I'm an old fool, but it seems like sacrilege. It's enough to make Woodford turn in his grave."

Quaille sprang up and went to McHugh's side. Tommy slammed the book shut.

"Aw! I never claimed to be a Henry Irving. Mr. McHugh tells me to read the part, and I reads it. Never knew I was bad enough to frighten women and children."

Dolly turned away, her sullenness replaced by a remorse wholly feminine.

"I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings, Tommy," she said softly. "Don't hate me. I can't think why I burst out that way."

She put her handkerchief to her eyes. "I'm old and fanciful. It seemed as if I had to. Don't forget this house is full of ghosts for me."

Barbara went over and whispered to her. Quaille, anxious only to have the disturbing interruption concluded, sug-